

Photo Gallery

Eighth Best of ASEAN Performing Arts

“Cambodia: Diversity of Intangible Cultural Heritage”

Jakarta, 29 April 2011

The Best of ASEAN Performing Arts is a series of cultural events that showcases the richness and diversity of performing arts in the region. The purpose of the series is to promote ASEAN awareness through the region’s rich and diverse cultures as well as to acknowledge the important role that Jakarta has played over the last 35 years as the host city of the ASEAN Secretariat.

The Best of ASEAN Performing Arts was proposed by the Secretary-General of ASEAN, Dr Surin Pitsuwan, at the 3rd Meeting of the ASEAN Ministers Responsible for Arts and Culture in Nay Pyi Taw on 12 January 2008.

As the eighth ASEAN country participated in the Best of ASEAN Performing Arts Series, Cambodia presented “*Cambodia: Diversity of Intangible Cultural Heritage*”. Taking place at the *Usmar Ismail Hall, Gedung Pusat Perfilman Usmar Ismail*, Jakarta, Cambodia provided a wide selection of music, dance, musical instruments and theatrical presentation. The date 29 April was chosen to mark the accession of Cambodia as the tenth member of ASEAN 12 years ago, on 30 April 1999.

“*Cambodia: Diversity of Intangible Cultural Heritage*” was co-organised by the ASEAN Secretariat and the Ministry of Culture and Fine Arts of Cambodia, with support from the Permanent Mission of Cambodia to ASEAN, based in Jakarta.

The six previous Member States that have contributed to the success of the series were: Indonesia with “The Mosaic Archipelago” in May 2008; Thailand with “Tapestry of Thai Beauty and Grace” in August 2008; Singapore with “Singapore Showcase: Cultural Crossings” in April 2009; Myanmar with “The Royal Beauty of Golden Myanmar” in December 2009; Malaysia with “1Malaysia: Harmony in Cultural Diversity” in March 2010; Viet Nam with “Charming Viet Nam” in December 2010; and Brunei Darussalam with “Brunei’s Legacy” in March 2011.



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Sbek Thom (Khmer Shadow Theatre)

The Sbek Thom is a Khmer shadow theatre featuring two-meter high, non-articulated puppets made of leather openwork. Dating from before the Angkorian period, the Sbek Thom, along with the royal ballet and mask theatre, is considered sacred. Performances, dedicated to the divinities, could only take place on specific occasions, three or four times a year, such as the Khmer New Year, the King's birthday or the veneration of famous people. The shadow theatre was weakened after the fall of Angkor in the last century. However, it has evolved beyond a ceremonial activity to become an artistic form, while retaining its ritualistic dimension.



The puppets are made from a single piece of leather in a special ceremony for each character. Shiva and Vishnu, for example, are cut from the hide of a cow, which died accidentally or naturally and are finished in a single day following a specific ritual. The hides are dyed with a solution made from the bark of the kandaol. The artisan draws the desired figure on the tanned hide, then cuts it out and paints it before attaching it to two bamboo sticks which enable the dancer to control the puppet.

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The performances traditionally take place at night in the open air beside a rice-field or pagoda. A large white backdrop is held between two tall bamboo screens in front of a large fire or, nowadays, projectors. The shadow of the puppet's silhouette is projected onto this white screen. The animator brings the puppet to life with precise and specific dance steps that produce a range of movements. The performance is accompanied by an orchestra and two narrators. Performances from the reamker, the Khmer version of the Ramayana, might last several nights and require up to 160 puppets for a single session.

The Sbek Thorn was almost wiped out under the repressive Khmer Rouge regime but since 1979 has undergone a revival thanks to the few surviving artists. The collections of puppets were mostly destroyed but are gradually being re-made and troupes are being re-formed. So far, three shadow theatres have managed to rise from their ashes but they are terribly short of resources and opportunities to perform. In addition, the transmission of knowledge, techniques and know-how, especially relating to the manufacture of the puppets, is no longer ensured.

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Te Vak Srey Sour (Angel Dance)

Angel Dance is an expression of great talent of the God's dancers. The angel dancer of god that we haven't seen before are now put on the stage to show all the audiences how beautiful and graceful they are. Moreover, the gesture of the dance that we only have seen on the sculpture of Khmer temple, which is a basic and symbol of classical dance gesture that has 108 gestures from the God are now being shown in this dance.



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Mouth Organ of the Suoy Ethnic Dance

Ploy is a mouth organ type of instrument. A folk dance originated in the *Kampung Spoeu* Province. Dance blows into the ploy or mouth organs to recall the origin of time and to resort to myth of ethnic return.



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Khmer Music Instrument Solo

Although Cambodia is a small country that has ample natural resources, including cultural resources. Wherever they go in Cambodia, they always hear the sound of Khmer music. They always said Khmer people are artists, and now we will show them some Khmer instruments.



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Kandob Ses Dance (Praying Mantis Dance)

This traditional dance originated from the Svay Rieng Province, Cambodia. The gestures of the dance, largely imitates the praying mantis (grasshopper). During this dance, they wear costumes with the color of the praying mantis. The dancers beat the coconut shell in order to produce attractive sounds. Each dancer uses 3 pairs of coconut shell; one pair in hands, one pair on the elbows and another pair on the knees. It is always performed during the Khmer ceremony to bring happiness and joyfulness.



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Khmer Women Beauty Dance

Robam Khmer Women Beauty dance has several versions, including the Chhouy Chhay Chumtung (Chhouy Chhay the Adolescent), Chhouy Chhay Chhma (Chhouy Chhay the cat) and Chhouy Chhay Angkor (Chhouy Chhay the Angkor). The original Robam Khmer Women Beauty Dance was choreographed by Samdech Preah Norodom Suthearos. It praised the perfect beauty of a young princess for whom the dance was created.



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Buffalo Ritual Dance

Buffalo Ritual Dance is originally from the highlanders known as Pnong in Ratanakiri and Mondulakiri province, which is located in the northeastern of Cambodia. The sacrifice of a buffalo is to express their gratitude to the spirit for having blessed their crops. They drink rice wine and dance around the jar as a libation for the harmony and supernatural.



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Robam Moni Mekhala

Moni Mekhala is a classical khmer dance which depicts the greed and anger of a cruel person towards the innocent. The wicked must be vanquished in the end. Ream Eyso and Moni Mekhala are students, who have studied with the same teacher. Ream Eyso has a jealous heart, and hides in waiting for a chance to take the magic crystal ball from Moni Mekhala. Finally, he loses out to her intelligence and innocence, and to the power of her jeweled ball.



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Chhai Yaim Dance/ASEAN Friendship Flag Dance

Chhai Yaim Dance is a kind of folklore dance that uses the drum as the main instrument. Khmer people believed that whenever the Chhai Yaim Drums are beaten together, they always take away the evil spirit, unlucky and sadness from the village. And it brings back with prosperity, victory and happiness that made Chhai Yaim Dance frequently perform in Khmer traditional ceremony. The special thing of Chhai Yaim Dance is the conic which produced by the clown, who always makes the audiences laugh, enjoy and forget all their sadness.



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Closing

